

Compliance Corner

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AIR COMPLAINT

DEQ Southwest Regional Office (Lake Charles)

On Saturday, January 30, 1999, a Southwest Regional Office inspector observed black smoke billowing north of Nelson Road in Lake Charles, Louisiana. The inspector investigated the source of the smoke and determined that the source of the smoke was the CONDEA Vista Company Ethylene Flare. The CONDEA Vista Company indicated that an operator had opened a cap to test a switch. There was a bare wire in the switch that shorted out and caused a fuse to fail. The blown fuse falsely simulated the condition that the emergency shutdown switch had been pushed.

DEQ received several complaints as a result of the flaring incident.

A Notice of Violation and Potential Penalty was issued to CONDEA Vista Company on June 18, 1999 for the flare smoking in excess of 20% opacity for over six hours and intermittently for approximately eleven hours and seventeen minutes in excess of the allowable limits of LAC 33:III.1105.

DEQ issued a Penalty Assessment for \$1,032.50 to CONDEA Vista Company on December 16, 1999.

Editor's Note: This is an example of a DEQ proactive investigation that preceded complaints from the public. DEQ's Debbie Ford, an Environmental Scientist based in Lake Charles, observed smoke from I-210 in south Lake Charles early on a Saturday morning. "I went to investigate the source," she says. "After picking up my



A bright orange flame and dark, billowing smoke are visible signs of flaring from CONDEA Vista's Ethylene Flare in Lake Charles. DEQ issued a Penalty Assessment for \$1,032.50 to CONDEA Vista Company on December 16, 1999 for flaring in violation of Louisiana law.

DEQ van, I drove to Westlake & took photos of the flaring. I then went to the facility to inquire about the cause."

It was later that afternoon that Ms. Ford received information from DEQ's Emergency Response personnel that they had received complaints from the public about the flaring.

CONCLUSIONS

When the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality issues an operating per-

mit, it does so with the explicit understanding that the facility will operate within the confines of its permit. DEQ considers any permit breach, whether intentional or accidental, grounds for a possible enforcement action. DEQ will continue to move expediently as we satisfy our legislative mandate to protect the public welfare by maintaining and preserving clean air, waters and lands of the state while considering sound economic development.

Mississippi Spill

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Dwight stayed at the command post most of the time to assist in the planning and coordination of the clean up. He says, "They (DEQ employees) are my eyes in the field when I can't be there." Dwight takes the information that he receives from the field staff and uses it in his decision making.

The clean up effort will continue for the first few months of 2001. After the large amounts of oil are taken out of the water, the contractors will clean up the rocks and the shoreline. Once the active clean up ends, absorbent booms will be deployed to collect remaining oil that the workers could not wash out of the rocks along the river. The pads will be checked everyday until

the oil sheen on the water ceases to exist.

Dwight says, "The good thing about crude oil, particularly (sweet Nigerian crude), is eventually it will degrade." The sweet Nigerian crude appeared to be very frothy and light which means it will be more susceptible to biodegradation. Bacteria and other microorganisms will feed on the oil and it will eventually disappear.

During the clean up activities, a Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) is being assembled and the work will continue long after the last absorbent pad is picked up. All of the state and federal agencies involved in the clean up will have a part in the final process. It takes into account every bird, animal, fish, natural resource, and anything that was harmed as a result of the oil spill.

The oil is now contained and it is just a matter of picking it up. Dwight Bradshaw and other DEQ personnel will continue to monitor the situation until the clean up ends.

At left, Contractors worked to keep oil contained in tributaries to the Mississippi. Vacuum trucks and skimmer boats would eventually take the oil out of the water.

N. Louisiana Spill

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reintroduced into the pipeline at a different location. This process ended in early December and whatever oil that is left in the field will quickly biodegrade (Microorganisms will eat any residual oil on the ground).

DEQ oversaw the successful cleanup and remained at the scene until it was over.



Pictured above is an aerial view of the oil spill in a rice field in Morehouse Parish.